

NATIONAL REFORMATION THE WAY TO
PREVENT NATIONAL RUIN.

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CONSIDERED IN A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT A
MONTHLY EXERCISE,

ON ACCOUNT OF
The Present State of Public Affairs;


The Rev. Dr. GIBBONS's MEETING-HOUSE,

IN
HABERDASHER'S HALL,

February 20, 1782.

BY SAMUEL MORTON SAVAGE, D.D. *71*

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MONTHLY EXERCISES

The United States of America



The Rev. Dr. C. I. Lewis

T O
THE REVEREND MINISTERS,
WHO ATTENDED THE PREACHING,
AND REQUESTED THE PUBLICATION,
OF THIS PLAIN SERMON,
IT IS
MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

B Y
THEIR AFFECTIONATE BROTHER,
AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

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A

S E R M O N.

I APPEAR before you, at present, my Christian Brethren, on the revival of a monthly Religious Exercise, which used to circulate through the Congregational or Independent Churches, from above 40 years ago, till after the year 63; when on the return of peace and opulence, at the close of a most successful War, dissipation and indifference to religion began generally to prevail, and the Dissenters did not escape the infection; so that the Exercise dwindled, and was soon dropt for want of attendance. But the alarming and dangerous state into which our public affairs are now brought, has excited the Major Part of the Ministers of our Denomination to resolve to revive the Exercise, as a likely means, through the blessing of God, of reviving religion among us, and for imploring the divine Mercy, to avert the judgments which we feel or too justly fear, to restore peace, and to preserve to us our forfeited civil and religious liberties and privileges.

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We

We mean not to clash with, much less oppose, any other monthly Meetings, but to come in aid of them, to serve the same great ends. There is room enough, there is need enough for all to exert themselves, and we hope, we shall not be again discouraged from carrying on this Exercise, by seeing it neglected: but that both Ministers and their People will give it countenance by their serious attendance. You know when the hands of *Moses* were lifted up *Israel* prevailed against *Amalek* (*Exodus* xvii.) and “the fervent prayer of the righteous avails much.”

But if we expect our prayers to be heard, remember they must be attended with repentance and reformation: to enforce which shall be my present endeavor,

From those words of the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, which you have in the xviiiith chapter, 7 and 8 verses; “At what instant
“I shall speak concerning a nation and
“concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and
“to pull down and to destroy it; if that
“nation against whom I have pronounced,
“turn from their evil, I will repent of
“the evil that I thought to do unto them.”
On the contrary, verses 9 and 10; “And
“at what instant I shall speak concerning a
“nation and concerning a kingdom, to
“build and to plant it; if it do evil in
“my

“ my sight, that it obey not my voice, then
 “ I will repent of the good wherewith I
 “ said I would benefit them.”

This is the declaration of the Great and Blessed God, by his faithful servant *Jeremiah*, who executed the prophetic office through many insults and sufferings, from that obstinate people the *Jews*, for upwards of 40 years, under the reigns of *Josiah*, *Jehoiakim*, and *Zedekiah*, kings of *Judah*, with the last of whom the prophet lived to see the Babylonish Captivity take place, which he had forefold.

Calvin * observes, “ That God as it were
 “ entered his action and commenced and
 “ carried on his suit against the *Jews* by
 “ *Isaiah*, but by *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* he
 “ brought them in guilty, and past sentence
 “ upon them. By the prophet *Isaiah* he
 “ argued and pleaded the case with them,
 “ mixed the most tender admonitions along
 “ with the warmest expostulations; and
 “ joined the most gracious promises with
 “ his severest threatenings. But the gentle
 “ voice of this divine Rhetoric failing of
 “ effect, upon that base and hardened people,
 “ who were proof against all the ingenuous
 “ motives of kindness, heedless of threat-
 “ ened correction, and refractory under it;
 “ God, by the succeeding prophets *Jere-*
 “ *miah* and *Ezekiel*, changes his language.

* Proëmium ad *Jerem.* Operum, vol. 4.

“ and exalts his voice into thunder. He
 “ finishes the process, brings them in guilty,
 “ and passes sentence upon them, and chiefly
 “ employs the prophetic spirit in de-
 “ nouncing the terrors of his vengeance :
 “ yet this not without some mixture of
 “ encouragement to repentance. Though
 “ their sins had been so aggravated, their
 “ rebellion so long and so boldly persisted
 “ in, that it was necessary to vindicate his
 “ honor by inflicting punishment upon
 “ them, which is therefore many times in
 “ this prophesy formally denounced; yet
 “ that they might not become desperate,
 “ and thereby more hardened, he promised
 “ not to make a full end of them, but to
 “ turn again the captivity of *Zion*, and often
 “ points the truly humbled soul to the *Mes-*
 “ *siah's* kingdom.”

The prophet begins the chapter, of which
 our text is part, with a display of God's
 sovereign power, by the apt and common
 allusion, in Scripture, of a Potter, who is
 represented as fashioning his clay into some
 particular kind of vessel; but if it be not
 of a due temper, and by any means becomes
 unfit for the purpose, he breaks it in pieces,
 works it up again, and forms it into any
 other vessel that he pleases; verses 1, 2, 3, 4.

The design of this simile is explained, and
 applied in the 6th verse; “ O house of
 “ *Israel*, cannot I do with you as this potter,
 “ saith the Lord; Behold as the clay is in
 “ the

“ the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand,
 “ O house of *Israel*.” He appeals to their own reason; for that, if consulted, would certainly shew them, that God’s power over them was infinitely more absolute than that of the potter over the clay; which he only moulds and fashions, but cannot, properly speaking, increase or destroy one grain of its substance; whereas God, the Almighty Creator, called all things into being by the word of his power, (which phrase perhaps imports the *Ease* wherewith he created them) and therefore he can not only change the manner of their existence, alter their forms, but is able, at pleasure, utterly to destroy all the works of his hand, and crush them out of being.

So entirely dependent upon him are all his creatures, so absolute and sovereign is his power! But then he always acts as a just Judge, rendering unto all according to their works. This is the import of what he immediately adds in my text; “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation
 “ and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up,
 “ and to pull down and to destroy it, &c.”
 “ *At what instant I shall speak,*” in the 7th and 9th verses *, might be rendered, “ *Instantly or suddenly will I speak,*” which is more literal, and makes the declaration more positive; and in the 8th verse, “ If

אֲדַבֵּר רָע * יִשְׁמַח

“ that

“ that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil,” would be better rendered, “ But if that nation turn from its evil, about which I have spoken to it, or on account of which I have pronounced against it.”

God speaks to a nation either immediately by the mouths of the prophets, or by the written declarations of his word, or by the voice of his providence. By his prophets he immediately and frequently declared of old to the *Jews*, the general and unvaried maxim of his providential government, which he has transmitted down to us in the words of my text, and which he always has been, is and will be confirming, by the operations of his hand, in the affairs of nations.

The sense of the whole passage may run thus; “ When a nation grows rampant in wickedness, suddenly will I bring my judgments upon them; such judgments as they did not at all look for, but thought themselves entirely secure from; and I will pour out my wrath if they persist in their rebellion, till I have utterly destroyed them as a nation and a people. But if that nation repent and turn from those evil courses, which I have warned them of in my word, and on account of which I am declaring against them, in the dispensations of my providence; then will I suspend my avenging hand, turn away
“ from

“ from smiting them, and put a stop to
 “ those judgments that threatened their
 “ utter destruction, and will return again
 “ unto them to do them good. But on the
 “ contrary, when I have smiled upon a
 “ nation, made it my peculiar care, have
 “ opened its way to peace, and strength, and
 “ affluence, and seemed going to make it
 “ the envy of all the kingdoms of the earth;
 “ yet if this nation, growing full, forgets
 “ me, breaks through its allegiance to me,
 “ violates my laws, and gives itself up to
 “ vice and impiety; then will I blast their
 “ opening prosperity, recall the blessings I
 “ had lavished upon them, and withhold
 “ those they promised themselves, and which
 “ the course of my providence seemed to
 “ insure them: I will punish their ingra-
 “ titude, and visit their sins with deso-
 “ lating judgments.”

This is our present melancholy situation;
 and the text thus explained supplies us with
 very suitable matter for our Meditations,
 under the hand of God that is lifted up
 against us. I shall raise from it these three
 general observations.

I. National Iniquity will certainly bring
 down National Judgments.

II. These are loud calls to National Re-
 pentance and Reformation.

III. Repentance and Reformation are sure
 indications and conditions of deliverance and
 continued prosperity.

I. National

I. National *Iniquity*, of which the abuse of the divine goodness is the blackest, will certainly bring down national *Judgments*. This may be proved,

First of all, from the *reason* of things. God will vindicate his honor, and make it appear that he acts as a wise and just Governor, and righteous Judge of the universe; and as such, he must make a difference betwixt those that serve him, and those that serve him not. The nations of the earth that are without the written law, that are not favored with those particular declarations of his will, and the method of his grace, which we are blest with; “yet
“ these are not without law, but are a law
“ unto themselves, having the things of the
“ law written in their hearts.” The light of nature will, or might, teach them the grand duties of Morality and first principles of Religion; such as the fear and love, the homage, worship, and obedience, that are due to their Creator and Benefactor, “who
“ has not left himself without a witness
“ among them, in that he does them good,
“ gives them rain from Heaven, and fruitful
“ seasons, filling their hearts with food and
“ gladness.”

God has taken care that there should be light sufficient, though but glimmering, through the ruins of the fall, to shew the essential

essential difference of vice and virtue, and make the path of a creature's duty plain to all, who do not wilfully extinguish that light, and get their conscience seared. No nation under the sun has yet been found so barbarous, as not to have some notion of moral good and evil, some sense of religion, that there is some superior Being, who is concerned about their actions, and will punish their faults.

As for the people who enjoy the light of Revelation; the grand end and design of that, is to shew the importance of holiness; "for this is the will of God even your sanctification."

The books of nature, providence and grace conspire to prove, that God is a being of spotless holiness, and "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without abhorrence." Now what should hinder him from manifesting the indignation of his heart, by the power of his hand? Justice is essential to the divine nature, and that must lead him to punish offenders, and make examples of those that violate the laws which he himself has given them, writing them in their hearts, or giving them a fairer copy in his word.

That Punitive Justice is in God might be largely proved, but it is not necessary, since it must be allowed by all, our consciences tell us God is an avenger of sin; they are often whispering, *Cave, spectat Deus*, take heed, God beholds; beholds, to punish the violation of his laws; and the boldest sinners

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sometimes

sometimes hear this voice of conscience raised into storms of terror.

You easily see how natural to mankind is the notion of divine Justice, from what is recorded of the Heathen Inhabitants of *Melita* *, and barbarous or uncivilized Heathens too, not improved by learning and philosophy; *Acts* xxviii. 3, 4, where we read, “ And when *Paul* had gathered a bundle of “ sticks, and laid them on the fire, there “ came a viper out of the heat, and fastened “ on his hand. And when the Barbarians “ saw the venomous animal hang on his “ hand, they said among themselves, No “ doubt this man is a murderer, whom, “ though he has escaped the sea, yet *vengeance*, or divine Justice, *Δίκη*, suffers not “ to live.” This is the natural language of mere unassisted reason, that God will punish sin; but their application was not just, for God does not always make examples of sinners in this world. The wise man tells us, “ That there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; *Eccl.* ix. 2.” and not only the wiser Heathens but the devout Psalmist (*Psalms* lxxiii.) was puzzled about the common state of things here; *viz.* “ that the ungodly often prosper, and are “ not in trouble as other men; but he was

* Not the modern *Malta*, but an Island in the *Adriatic* Sea; as Mr. *Bryant* has proved in the second Dissertation annexed to his learned *Observations on Ancient History*, 4to. 1767.

“ satisfied

“ satisfied when he came to understand or
“ consider their end.”

We should remember, that this is not the state of retribution for particular persons, that is reserved to the other world; there is a day coming, sinner, it is an awful day, “ when God will reckon with every soul of “ man that doth evil.” But this is not the case with nations; God must deal properly with them in this world*, because they have no existence in the next. Kingdoms, and states, bodies politic, the societies of men, are but Time’s ambitions, that like the bubbles of a rivulet, are lost with it in the ocean of eternity: they are confined to this state, and will perish with it, and will never be set up again in the other world; they are therefore the immediate objects of God’s present government.

The nations of the earth are the grand theatre of God’s providence; here he appears throwing back, as it were, the curtain that hides the invisible world, and reveals himself in all the glories of justice and power. Thus, because the old world, before the Flood, might be considered as one community, probably not parceled into different kingdoms and states, God punished them all together, as one impious nation, with a general destruction. From his dealing with

* Not that this distinction excludes his Providence from extending to Individuals; see Dr. *Leland’s View of the Deistical Writers*, vol. 2, p. 215, 8vo. 1755.

nations we may learn, that there is a God who judges in the earth, a God who will protect and defend a people that keep his laws, who will clothe a righteous nation with strength and beauty, and crown them with honor; who will judge a bloody and deceitful people, and make a wicked nation "consume away in its own wickedness." The Justice of God cannot fail to punish national iniquity with national judgments, and his wisdom generally appears in permitting the sins of a people to work out their punishment; as they will naturally do; but of this perhaps more properly under the next general head.

II. *Scripture* witnesses to this truth, that God will judge a nation for their iniquity. 'Tis not only the plain declaration of my text, that "if a nation do evil in the sight of God, and obey not his voice," he will put a stop to the blessings his hand was heaping upon them, will change the course of his providence, and come forth against them in awful judgments, "to pluck up" and pull down and destroy them;" but the general current and burden of all the prophets, is to denounce vengeance on rebellious and wicked nations. That it was so of *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* especially, I before observed, and it is so of most of the other prophets: in *Nabum* and *Habakkuk* you have the most terrible display of national judgments.

All the calamities that ever come upon a nation are so many judgments of God for their sins; they spring not out of the dust, they are not the product of time and chance, nor to be ascribed merely to second causes, but to God, who righteously permits and orders second causes to work together for the punishment of a guilty people. There is no natural evil in a city but God has done it, he has brought it upon them as the just recompence of moral evil; the evil of punishment will follow the evil of sin, as the shadow will the body. To cite particular passages on this head would be endless: I would only desire you to consult, at your leisure, the xxviiith chapter of *Deuteronomy*: There God lays before the *Israelites* the manner in which he would deal with them as a nation and people, and which, by a parity of reason, will extend to all the kingdoms and nations of the earth. From the beginning of the chapter to the 15th verse, you have a catalogue of the temporal blessings that would be the reward of their obedience, of national holiness and virtue: from thence to the end of the chapter, you have the dreadful roll of curses, with which God threatens to visit their sins and rebellion.

Sure none, who will consider that chapter seriously, can have slight thoughts of sin, which is threatened with such affecting punishments: and let none presume to think the threatenings of God like those of a foolishly

ishly fond parent, who never executes them, for the terrible sentence there pronounced was at last literally executed, in the destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Romans*.—— Which leads me to add,

III. That we have numerous *examples* of divine judgments poured out upon sinful nations, both in sacred and profane *History*. Time would fail me to enumerate these. What nations and people has God visited in awful justice, “and plucked up and pulled “down and destroyed!” Where is the *Egyptian*, where the *Syrian* and *Assyrian* monarchies, that made such a figure in the records of ancient ages? They are utterly blotted out of existence, and their memory has almost perished. What is become of the *Grecian* and *Roman* empires, those later lords of mankind, and scourges of the universe, that swept away nations like the dust of the balance? They filled up the measure of their iniquities, and God has taken them away; “how are the mighty fallen!” The *Greeks* and *Romans*, who used to give law to the nations, are now, in a political view, some of the most contemptible people in *Europe*; the one, a little province of ignoble slaves, lost in the vast *Turkish* empire; the other, an enervated race of tame vassals to ecclesiastic tyrants, who lord it over soul and body.

But not to dwell upon these, or upon the example of the nations which God drove out before the children of *Israel*, and gave to their sword,

sword, to utter destruction; “not for any
 “righteousness in them,” as he expressly
 declares, but “for the wickedness of those
 “nations.” If any people could hope to be
 exempted from this general rule of divine
 government, surely the *Jews* were they.
 They were the people of God’s choice, se-
 lected from all the other nations of the earth,
 “to be a peculiar treasure unto God;” for
 the forming and settling of whom he wrought
 such wonders, in whose state he immediately
 presided as King, to whom the divine oracles
 were committed, and among whom he made
 his glory visible; who were the descendants
 of *Abraham*, his friend, and heirs of *Abra-*
ham’s blessing. But it was upon the con-
 dition, as *Calvin* * justly observes, that they
 were also heirs of his faith and obedience.

It was the folly of the *Jews* to flatter
 themselves, because they were the children
 of *Abraham*, to whose seed the promises were
 made, that therefore they had an indefeasible
 right, or absolute title to God’s providential
 favor, and that it was engaged to them by
 an unchangeable covenant, though they broke
 this covenant, and polluted, and even often
 abolished the true worship of God. This
 mad presumption God warns them of in the
 verse before my text; “O house of *Israel*,
 “cannot I do with you as this potter, saith

* Commentary on the verses preceding my text,
 Works, V. iv.

“ the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the
 “ potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O
 “ house of *Israel*.” Think not that your
 privileges secure you from my resentment;
 no, they aggravate it. “ You only have I
 “ known, of all the families of the earth,
 “ therefore, more severely therefore, will
 “ I punish you for all your iniquities.”
Amos iii. 2. “ Presume not upon my cove-
 “ nant obligations to you, for they are for-
 “ feited, because you have virtually re-
 “ nounced it, by your Sabbath-breaking,
 “ your Idolatry, and other abounding trans-
 “ gressions.” Therefore, what God lays
 down, in general, in my text, he bids the
 prophet apply immediately to them, in the
 11th verse. “ Now, therefore, go to, speak
 “ to the men of *Judab*, and to the inha-
 “ bitants of *Jerusalem*, saying; Thus saith
 “ the Lord, Behold I frame evil against you,
 “ and devise a device against you.” To the
 same purpose he often declares, “ he would
 “ visit their transgression with a rod, and
 “ their iniquity with stripes:” and this,
 they should have remembered, was the very
 original tenor of his covenant with them,
 as in the before-mentioned xxviiith of *Deu-*
teronomy.

And the judgments threatened in the law,
 and foretold in prophecy, are recorded in
 history. Many were their slaveries and cap-
 tivities; various the armies of God’s ven-
 geance; sword, famine, and pestilence, lead
 the

the van; judicial blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, bring up the rear; and at last, when their measure of iniquity was full, he took away their place and nation, and has scattered them, as vagabonds, over the face of the earth, to carry with them, at once, the proofs of his justice, and of the truth of the gospel, which they have rejected. Thus God dealt with his peculiar people the *Jews*; and such have been the dispensations of his providence to many a professing people under the gospel.

The Seven Churches of *Asia*, mentioned in the *Revelations*, are now no more; and most of those to which the apostolic writings are directed, with many of the Eastern Nations, have now lost the Christian Name, and been long given up to the Mahometan Imposture. They forsook the purity of their faith and practice; the light shone for a while in their darkness, “but they loved darkness rather than light;” therefore, God, in righteous judgment, removed it. And how many of the nations of *Europe* are given up “to strong delusion, that they should believe a lye!” who, though they retain the Christian Name, have exchanged the Christian Religion for Popish, which is even worse in its influence on morals than Pagan, Idolatry.

For many ages did this superstitious and soul-destroying tyranny hold all *Europe* bound in its chains of darkness, and very heavy did
D they

they lie on our land, till God at length burst them asunder, and gave us to exert our liberty, caused his gospel to flourish among us, and attended us with his blessing. We have been a people, whom “ he has builded “ and planted; the happy people whose God “ has been the Lord, JEHOVAH;” who has often saved us when apparently at the brink of ruin, and wrought deliverance for us “ when there appeared to be no deliverer “ nigh.”

Whether God has not reason to repent him of these his benefits towards us, judge ye? And therefore, whether our abused liberty shall not be at length taken away, our misimproved riches and plenty turned into want and misery, and what is still more tremendous, whether the Golden Candlestick of the Gospel shall not be at last removed, is matter of just fear. We need not look back to the days of old; we need not search abroad, though the overflowing scourge has indeed been sweeping through the earth, to see the connexion of national iniquity and national judgments; we see, we feel them upon ourselves. That the hand of the Lord has been for some time lifted up against us, and is now descending with severe strokes, is too visible; and that our sins have richly deserved it, is too sad, too plain a truth to be denied; our sin and punishment are too well known to need enlargement.

What,

What, can we doubt of the one; when avarice and extortion, open injustice, frauds and forgeries, when pride and luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, the rage of gaming, profaneness and blasphemy; when, in short, vice and immorality of every kind and degree, when irreligion and impiety, in every shape, are not only found among us, but abound in the midst of us; when the works of darkness, vices that among the Heathens took to the covert of the night, now seek the light, stalk in the face of day, and defy the resentment of God and man? The corruption both in principles and manners is become very near universal; so that wherever we turn ourselves, on the right hand or on the left, our ears are wounded, our eyes polluted; shame and confusion of face belong unto us, “because iniquity abounds, and “because the love of many waxes cold,” the power of Godliness almost disappears, religion languishes into a mere name and indifference, and carnality prevail among its professors.

As our Guilt is evident, can we have any more doubt of the reality of our Punishment? Are we so insensible as not to be persuaded, that God has an awful controversy with us, that his judgments are gone abroad among us, and that he is “writing terrible things “in righteousness against us?” When we are engaged in a most unnatural civil war, and have, at the same time, a foreign war to

maintain, without one human ally, against some of the greatest powers of *Europe*, who have perfidiously thrust themselves into the contest between *Great Britain* and her *American* Colonies, in order to compleat the ruin of both, and divide their spoils: a war that has consumed the lives of many thousands of our fellow-subjects, as well as millions of money, and dismembered our empire, and in which, though we have had our successes, and have been enabled to support it beyond expectation, we have met with some such remarkable disappointments, and humbling losses, as make the finger of God manifest in them? Shall we not be yet awakened, to stand in awe of God, and acknowledge his hand, and to beg of him that such conviction may have the due effect upon us? I pass on therefore to my

II. General Head.—That the judgments of God are loud *calls* to national *repentance* and *reformation*.

For, in the first place, this is God's *design* in sending them. As "he does not willingly grieve or afflict any of the children of men, but if need be;" so it is "for their profit to make them partakers of his holiness." God does not punish merely to satisfy his justice, to vindicate the honor of his law, and by making examples of offenders, to deter others from imitating their sins; but his punishments,

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in this state, are ordinarily in a way of correction, and have a view to the amendment of the subjects of them.

He does not come to extremities at once; he does not, like a judge, pronounce sentence of death, and order its immediate execution; but in a milder way, he corrects with a father's hand, and mixes remonstrances with punishment. He usually threatens before he strikes, that our repentance might prevent the blow, and render it not necessary. How moving are his expostulations by the prophet *Hosea*, with the people of *Israel*! *Hosea* xi. 8. "How shall I give thee up, *Ephraim*? how shall I deliver thee, *Israel*? how shall I make thee as *Admah*? how shall I set thee as *Zeboim*? (cities which he had utterly destroyed, like *Sodom*, see *Deut.* xxix. 23.) "mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Thus he warned the *Ninevites* by *Jonah*; and you know what happy end it answered; and thus he is to be considered as pleading with and warning every nation that enjoys his word.

And he, besides, generally causes things so to work about, that a gathering storm in providence, might be discerned before it comes; which is to give space for repentance and reformation. But when a people are grown so careless and indifferent, that they will not see, till they are made to feel, his hand, it usually falls more lightly at first, and his judgments increase by degrees, if they are not attended to; and it is long before

before he quite gives up a people. They have many breathing times indulged them, that they might attend to the things of their peace, that they might "hear the voice of the rod, and who has appointed it;" that by his judgments being among them, they might learn righteousness.

Thus has God graciously dealt with *US*; often has he scourged us, and often has he healed our wounds; he has shaken us as it were over the pit of destruction, and seemed to be ready to cast us down; but his hand has again lifted us up, and saved us, when we called upon him.

What then can be the language of his past and present dispensations, but that we should return unto him from whom we have grievously revolted; "for why should we be stricken any more?" God is speaking to us, as in the verse after my text to the *Jews*, "Behold I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you; return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."

2. National judgments are loud calls to repentance and reformation, as they are types and earnest, or *preludes* and *pledges* of the future *universal judgment*. God's dealings with sinful nations in this world, and his punishing the iniquity of a people, manifest the reality of his hatred to sin, and are a confirmation and application of the solemn account that is given us, in Scripture, of
that

that great and dreadful day of his wrath, when he shall sit in judgment upon every son and daughter of *Adam*, and doom the impenitent Christless sinner to everlasting punishment. “ God, though he principally “ reserves his judgments for the other world, “ yet frequently gives us specimens of them “ in this,” says *Grotius* *. Thus the final destruction of the *Jewish* state is represented in *Matthew* xxiv. and other places, in such a manner, as will also agree to the general destruction of the world; to intimate that the One was a certain Type of the Other; and so national judgments are called the coming of *Christ*, as they are preludes to his final coming to judge the universe.

When the sword of divine justice is waving over a nation, descends and steeps itself in blood; when combined, powerful, inveterate, and mortal enemies are hovering round a people, and watching an opportunity to root them out, and to destroy them; such should be the language of every individual: “ See, “ O my soul, the fruits of sin; if these are “ the earnest, what will the wages be? If “ such are the sparks of divine indignation, “ who can dwell with its everlasting burn- “ ings? How shall my heart endure, or my “ hand be strong, in that day, when even “ the Lamb of God will put on all the ter- “ rors of the lion, and tear in pieces, and

* In the Prolegomena, § 20, to his *De Jure*, &c.

“ there

“ there shall be none to deliver ? O let me
 “ lay down the weapons of my rebellion,
 “ and fly betimes for refuge, to lay hold on
 “ the hope set before me.” Again,

3. National judgments are loud calls to repentance and reformation, as they shew us the *instability* of all earthly things, and the *insecurity* of all earthly dependencies. We find ourselves surrounded in this world with a variety of pleasing objects, that strike our senses, seize our affections, and are too apt to gain all our hearts ; we fix our hopes, take up our rest here, and act as if we were to live here always ; forgetting, that “ this “ is not our rest, because it is polluted ; ” that we have immortal souls, which are made for eternity, and that this life is only a state of preparation for eternal life. It is true, our Bibles read us this lesson, and our reason assents to its truth ; but because the things of the other world are invisible, are matters of faith instead of sight, they do not much affect us, and we are too apt to lose the thoughts of them.

But when God comes forth against a nation in a way of judgment ; when he overturns kingdoms and states, brings the desolations of war into their borders, or bids famine and pestilence thin a city, or storms and inundations, or conflagrations lay it waste ; this is striking at our sensible comforts, it startles the carnal and secure sinner, and demands of him, ‘ Whether these things can be his
 ‘ portion ?

‘portion? Whether these are all his happiness, these that are so precarious? And whether he must not be for ever miserable, if he have no portion beyond the grave?’ This gives conscience, that may have been long stifled, an opportunity to do its office, and that will naturally produce some sort of repentance and reformation; which indeed, except it be the genuine work of God’s spirit, when his hand is removed, soon vanishes.

God’s own people are too sadly prone to let their hearts cleave too much to the creature, and during an uninterrupted state of prosperity, settle upon their lees, lose the life of religion, become earthly, instead of being spiritually minded, withdrawing their affections from Heaven, where *Christ* their treasure is, and grow too conformable to the fashion of a vain world. Now national calamities, as well as private afflictions, have a great tendency to awaken us to a sense of our sin and of our duty. Have our hearts been set upon riches and grandeur, upon pompous and flourishing circumstances? Have they been glewed to pleasure and gaiety, to the pride of life? Have they been too anxiously divided among friends and acquaintance, and engrossed by our social comforts? Have we built too much upon a mere profession of religion, and the enjoyment of gospel-privileges and gospel-ordinances?

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But,

But, alas, when the *Public* is in danger, these must totter, all our private comforts of an external kind become precarious. Should God at last give up our nation into the hands of those, whose envy makes them hate us with a perfect hatred; whatever some persons absurdly imagine, we must be stripped of all these comforts, of every thing here that is dear to us, as *Men* and *Englishmen* and *Christians*.

Surely this is enough to alarm us, and convince us of our folly in forsaking God, “ the fountain of living water, and hewing out unto ourselves such broken cisterns, that will hold no water,” will administer no lasting satisfaction. This calls us to repent and return unto the Lord, who will be our everlasting portion; to draw off our affections from these perishing things, and replace them upon *Christ*, and the divine enjoyments of the eternal world, and “ to cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart, and serve him in newness of life.” This conclusion the Apostle *Peter* draws, *Ild Epistle*, iii. 11. from the consideration of the approaching destruction of the *Jewish* church and state, as Dr. *Owen* * understands that text; “ Seeing then that all these things,” the city, the temple, the civil and religious polity, “ shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” Once more,

* Sermons and Tracts, F. 1721. Sermon. 8th.

4. The judgments of God upon a nation are loud calls to repentance and reformation, as they are generally *adapted* to the *prevailing sins* of a nation. The Old Testament history would furnish us with abundant instances of this nature. When the *Jews* were guilty of idolatry, which was not only sinning against God, as the God of mankind, and Creator of all things, but was high-treason against him, as the King of their state; when they became so stupidly wicked as to serve the gods of the neighbouring nations, his constant method of punishment was, by giving them up to serve those very nations, and bringing them into slavery to those very people, whose idols they had borrowed. This was a likely means of shewing them their folly, in trusting to dumb idols, and giving them a feeling conviction, that there was none able to deliver besides the Lord of Hosts.

So when, tired of his government, and desirous to symbolize with the heathen nations round them, they rebelliously asked a king, he gave them one in his wrath, who made them smart bitterly for their sin and folly. So when *David*, in the pride of his heart, caused the people to be numbered, in order to know his full strength for war, which was invading God's prerogative in that state, God sent the pestilence to sweep them off, in order to humble him for his vain confidence in their strength and number.

Thus too, when, in contradiction to God's command, they made leagues with their heathen neighbours, and when in danger of an invasion, called in their allies to their assistance, God sold them into the hand of those nations, to teach them their folly and guilt, in withdrawing their dependance from him, and "making flesh their arm."

But to enlarge no further upon this point, which is so plain in sacred history, that none who converse with it can fail of frequently making such observations: We should apply it to our own nation, to our own times, and hearken to the special voice of God's judgments, see for what sins he is declaring against us, what are the evils of which he is reproving us; that we may be humbled under them, and taught the improvement of his judgments for them. But not to break in too far upon the time requisite for prayer, the principal object of this Exercise, I shall only hint at a *few* particulars here, out of *many* that offer.

And surely you must join with me in acknowledging, that one of our national sins is the excessive *Luxury* and *Extravagance*, which for these many years has been the reigning taste of the nation,—that inordinate love of pleasure and gaiety, which has infected people of all ranks and conditions, and caused places of diversion, which tend to corrupt and debauch the mind, to swarm in every part of the town and country. God
has

has punished us for this rioting in plenty, by the expences and desolations of war; which, while they have enormously enhanced the price of every thing, exhaust the public treasury, and render private property precarious.

Another sin we have been remarkable for, is *Vain Confidence* and *Carnal Security*; a trust in our own wisdom, and glorying in our own strength. For this, God has punished us by most remarkable and humiliating disappointments through the course of the war; and till this spirit is reduced, we can have no room to hope for success. If we will go on to act without God, we shall only continue to meet with losses and disgrace.

Again, while we have learned to despise *Government*, and *spurned at all Subordination*, and would not be humbled by God's judgments while abroad, he brought them home to us; by permitting such a riot of the Mob to be raised, and spread and prevail in the Capital several days, to the terror of all the inhabitants, and the danger of public credit, in such a manner, as will appear a romance to future ages; and if the military force had not been at length employed, imagination can scarce say where it would have stopped.

And to mention no more, we have been long *studying and adopting the atheistical principles and loose manners of the French*, till we have dropped our religion, and have sunk the sterling bullion of our old national character,

rafter, down almost to the tinsel of theirs; and in consequence, we now see ourselves in great danger of being overpowered, and enslaved, by their superiority of numbers, and that of their allies.

Such are our sins, and such the judgments which we have felt, still feel, and may expect to fall more heavily upon us, if we do not attend to their spiritual voice, and improve the space which God's mercy has given us, "to turn unto the Lord that we may live." Which brings me to add,

III. and Lastly. That repentance and reformation are sure *Indications* and *Conditions* of *Deliverance*. They are not only indications and good omens, but they are the conditions of deliverance; they are the end for which God first sends his judgments, and when that end is answered, he has graciously promised to remove them, but not before. When a people will not be reformed by God's judgments, ruin and destruction will be the issue; he will not spare for ever; "nor will he always strive with men, and stretch out his hand to a rebellious people;" he will turn his corrections into capital punishments, and pour out the full measures of his wrath.

It is a sad symptom, when a nation is secure under God's judgments, and goes on in its evil courses; God will at last give them up to a judicial blindness of mind and hardness of heart, to say with the *Jews* to the prophet *Jeremiah*, in the 12th verse of
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the chapter where our text is; " There is
 " no hope, but we will walk after our own
 " devices, and we will every one do the
 " imagination of his evil heart ;" of such a
 people it must be expected ; " That God will
 " scatter them (as it follows in the 16th and
 " 17th verses) as with an East Wind, be-
 " fore the enemy, that he will shew them
 " the back and not the face in the day of
 " their calamity, will make their land de-
 " solate, and a perpetual hissing."

This has been the case with most of the
 considerable nations of the world : they have
 risen from small beginnings to plenty, wealth,
 and power ; then getting drunk with prof-
 perity, they have soon lost all their virtues,
 and let loose the reins to every kind of wick-
 edness ; upon which God has visited them
 with one judgment after another, and when
 they have grown only more hardened thereby,
 more daringly irreligious, and more uni-
 versally dissolute in their manners, this has
 paved the way to their utter Extirpation.

This was the case with the *Jews* ; when
 God had tried every method with that his
 chosen and peculiar people, and all his
 mercies and judgments were lost upon them ;
 the long-delayed vengeance came at last, and
 the ruin was great and dreadful, as the storm
 had been many ages gathering. The more
 a nation has trifled with God's patience, the
 longer the space that has been given them,
 given but in vain, for repentance ; the deeper
 shall

shall they drink of the cup of his wrath, he will empty upon them all the phials of his anger. As he had distinguished the *Jews* with such peculiar favor, so he at last distinguished them as much in his resentment; for never did any history parallel the misery brought upon them, the desolation and slaughter that was made of them by the *Romans*, within half a century after our Lord's Crucifixion.

As God has made us like them in our privileges, in such distinguishing mercies, and we have copied them exactly in our sins; would to God, that sooner or later, the likeness be not compleated in our final destruction; that his despised gospel be not removed; that our abused liberty be not taken away.

The only door of hope is attending to his judgments, and becoming a reformed, that we may not be made a ruined people. O that the spirit of God may lift up a standard against the floods of profaneness and infidelity, vice and immorality that overflow us, and make our return to him be as general and hearty, as our revolt from him has been! If by his judgments, which have been and still are abroad in our land, "the inhabitants learn righteousness," this will be one of the most happy events of his providence, and we shall ever have reason to adore him, that he has not given us up, that he has not said, "Let them alone, why should they be stricken
 " any

“ any more, they will revolt yet more;” but has corrected us in mercy, that we might not be destroyed in his fury.

If the weight of his hand upon us does but break us off from our sins, and cause us to turn from our evil ways, then he assures us in my text, “ That he will repent of the “ evil that he thought to do unto us.”

Repentance in the creature, and in its proper sense, implies a change of mind, and, in consequence of that, a change of conduct. So it is said of *Esau*, “ that he could find no “ place for repentance, though he sought it “ carefully, or earnestly, with tears.” *Heb.* xii. 17. That is, he could not prevail upon his father *Isaac* to change his mind, and so to reverse the blessing which he had pronounced upon *Jacob*.

But God is of one mind, and who, or what shall turn him? No event can happen to induce the infinitely wise and all-seeing God to alter his mind, and change his design. God is therefore said to *repent*, only in a figurative way of speaking, which implies, that he does as men do when they repent, or alter their minds; that is, according to the old maxim, *Mutat Deus facta non consilia*. He alters his visible course of action, or changes the appearances of his providence, without at all changing his mind, or forming any new designs; for “ known unto him are all his works from the beginning,” or from eternity. He has eternally and immutably

settled the order and connexion of all his providential dispensations; and this is the grand irreverfible law of his government. That when a nation, by their fins, make it neceffary for him to inflict punishment upon them, if they are humbled under his judgments, and repent of, and reform from their evil courfe, and return unto him with their whole hearts; then he will remove his judgments, and caufe all the Evil he had brought upon them to work together for their Good.

The light of nature could go no farther than a bare peradventure in this point; as you may fee in the cafe of *Nineveh*, *Jonah* iii. 9, 10. God has left that gracious example upon record for our encouragement. But it is the glory of revelation, that it puts the matter paft doubt; and in the words of our text you have it put into the abfolute form of a promise, which therefore the juftice of God makes it neceffary for him to ftand to and perform. And God's people have ftill a further encouragement revealed in the gofpel, and that is, that the reins of government are put into the hand of the Lord *Jesus Chrift*; how comfortable to the believer, that *Jesus*, his Saviour, is the King of nations, and overrules all the affairs of the world!

If then God's late dealings with us, and the prefent pofture of affairs, have but this happy effect, to produce in us a genuine repentance, a change of heart, and a change
of

of life and conversation; we have full assurance that God will mercifully change the face of things, will cause light to spring up out of darkness, order out of confusion, will restore peace and tranquility, plenty and prosperity; and the shakings in the nation shall be found the means to purge us from our dross, to refine and purify us, to unite us more firmly to our God, to our happy government, and to one another, to settle our peace and security upon more solid foundations, and make us long continue a people spared of the Lord, that people whom he delights to honor.

I have hitherto insisted upon the voice of God's judgments to the nation in general; which is, "Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." Permit me now to add by way of application—

1. The call is loudest to his *own people*, those who not only make a peculiar profession, but stand in a special covenant relation to him. Their sins are attended with such increased aggravation, as makes them most highly displeasing to God, and calls for the severest correction. Our sins, my christian brethren, bear a great weight in bringing down the divine judgments upon our land; and therefore, our country demands our repentance and reformation, our profession demands it, our God demands it.

Our sins are so many acts of high treason against our country; as they expose it to the divine indignation, and remove that protection from it, which, for the sake of a few righteous, he would extend to the sinful people among whom we dwell. They bring a scandal upon our profession. If we are found no more just, and righteous, and merciful in our dealings, no more pious, holy and heavenly in our conversation, at home in our families, and abroad in the world, than the generality of men; if we do no more than others, (ah, what if we do less!) it will expose our peculiar profession to censure, as merely the effect of pride and affectation, or of base hypocrisy.

Again, the sins of believers are highly offensive to God, and therefore he demands our sincere repentance. Since they betray such base ingratitude to his rich and sparing, to his saving mercy; since they are such vile breaches of covenant, and so many withdrawals of our allegiance to the Lord *Jesus Christ*, whom we have acknowledged and accepted for our king; and since they bring so much scandal upon the doctrines of grace, and cause them to be blasphemed, as if they gave encouragement to licentiousness, and made our Blessed Saviour the minister of sin: this is wounding him in the most tender part. Let us therefore,

2. Each of us set about the work of *self-examination*. That is a work highly suitable
and

and necessary to follow such an Exercise as this. And to do this to any good purpose, let me remind you, that *Christ* is to be applied to, “ who is exalted to give repentance “ as well as remission of sins.” Look up to him as both the Great Prophet and High Priest of your profession ; and under a sense of the treachery of your own hearts, humbly implore the assistance of his spirit, to enable you to set about the examination of your ways, with such a frame of mind, as that you may be full of indignation against sin, and abased in your own shame at the foot of his cross, and be heartily desirous of having every secret sin discovered, and be ready to part with it.

Apply to the spirit of *Christ*, to “ shew you what evil way there is in you,” and to enable you, by his powerful influence on your hearts, to exercise genuine repentance for it, when discovered, and to help you to apply by faith to the atoning virtue of his blood for its pardon, and cause you to forsake it, and make you victorious over it through his grace, and then lead you in the way everlasting ; to keep you walking closely with him in the exercise of those constant transactions and intercourses between him and your souls, that have the greatest tendency to maintain the favour of divine things upon your spirits, to keep up the hidden life of the christian, to purify your hearts, to strengthen your faith, enliven your hope,
and

and animate your obedience. That you may bring greater glory to God than ever by your conversation, and be a means of averting his judgments from your dear country; that you may stand in the breach between an offended God and a provoking people, and be found powerful intercessors.

This is an honor which I hope God will put upon us, and we have, I trust, some room for encouragement. However, this will be our own comfort, and it will glorify *Christ*, if in the midst of all the dangers that threaten us, and the desolations that are making in the earth, we live by faith, and cheerfully commit ourselves into his hands, as the Lord of nature, providence, and grace, who has yet "loved us, and given " himself for us."



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